

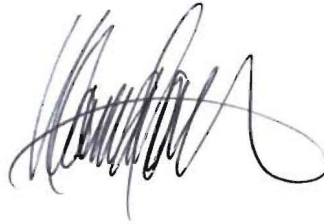
Passing On: An Act of Love in Five Parts

An Honors Thesis (ART 490)

by

Alexandra Corrinne LeNeave

Thesis Advisor  
Maura Jasper

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Maura Jasper', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Ball State University  
Muncie, Indiana

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Expected Date of Graduation  
May 2013

On the way to  
Thesis  
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## Abstract

*Passing On* is a phrase associated emphatically with death but also with transactions between generations, from one generation to another, value, stories, as well as actual objects are passed down through a line of people. Each person taking on a different role as caretaker of the same objects; just like with people, each of us respond to objects in different ways. Through the use of video, I plan to represent the growth of a relationship between a human and a collection of inanimate objects.

This collection of objects represent to me a chunk of my grandmother's life that she has now lost. Even though these objects have merely been relocated, from her home to mine, she holds no recollection of their physical presence in the world; to her they never existed. This video will be an investigation into my personal insecurities with the quasi-ownership of my grandmother's memories and how these insecurities affect my grandmother, our objects, and our relationship.

The video will be performance and self-portrait based, it will take place in the parameters of an oriental rug that will become the stage to this narrative. The rug represents, tradition, order, and a physical platform that represents my grandmother, for me to perform upon. The video is recorded from above and is only representational of the boundary of the rug, as well as what is in the parameters of the rug. The video is projected from the ceiling of the gallery onto a platform measuring 4" in height and roughly 4x7' feet in width and length respectively. The platform will sit at least 2 feet out from any wall or can be free standing in the middle of the room with 2 feet left empty around the platform for audience movement. The audience will look down onto the platform to view the projection. Accompanying the projection will be a free standing speaker, standing the height of my grandmother, 5'3" tall. The speaker omits my grandmother's voice, reciting significant life stories and observations about herself and her family.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Maura Jasper for mentoring me through this project, but also for teaching, advising and guiding me through the last four years of my college experience. I have learned so much about myself through this amazing process and I would never have been able to accomplish this without the help of so many amazing professors at Ball State University. So thank you also to Jacinda Russell, Kenton Hall and Mark Sawrie, who have been invaluable resources in my art making process.

I would also like to extend a thank you to my grandmother Del Rita Myers LeNeave, who truly made this project possible, regardless of any feeling expressed in this project, I truly appreciate having her as my grandmother and I love learning from her with each passing day.

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Bibliography

Image Sources

Also included:  
Exhibition photographs  
DVD copy of video



## Significance

Tell me your life story, tell me what you do, tell me who you are, tell me who I am...please. This is something grandchildren rarely ask their grandparents, this statement is true of me before this project began and prior to the summer of 2012. In August of 2012 my family forcibly moved my grandmother from her long-term home in Mayfield Kentucky, a home she had lived in for close to 50 years, and into an assisted living community closer to family that could take care of her. This move resulted in my grandmother having to make decisions about which objects, of the immense amount of things she had collected and kept in her home, to now move with her to a 700 square foot apartment. These choices in the summer of 2012 that truly began the relationship I now have with my grandmother.

The first 20 years of my life I had always been around my grandmother but never in a typical grandmother-granddaughter way. Our interactions were always the total opposite of that paradigm, I always felt more mature than my grandmother while I felt she seemed to possess the free spirit I thought I was supposed to have. The tables of child and adult were always turned in our situation. Because of this reason I felt a distance toward her and truly only connected myself to her through our physical appearance, everyone tells me I am a mini version of her, as well as our uncanny ability to collect and “hoard” things that most people would normally see as useless. But In August of 2012, my grandmother passed along a small portion of her collection to me. It was at this exchange that I felt bonded to my grandmother forever, or at least until I throw the collection away, which I know, I will never be able to do. While she thought she was giving me 7 boxes of “stuff” what she was really giving me was a piece of her life, and not the piece I was already a part of, this piece was from a time before me, it predated me by 30 years if not more, a time I had never heard of before. It became my sole job as her granddaughter, as well as an artist, to better understand her and all of these things she had so “purposefully” placed in my possession. As I started investigating I realized that what I thought was now mine, was really the both of ours. It was as though we were dual owners of these objects. I immediately became uncomfortable, seeing myself as a charlatan in her memories. This realization forced me to undertake a complete change in

my relationship to my grandmother; I had to actually have one. This project is the journey I am taking to create a true and meaningful relationship with my grandmother, while telling her story and mine.

The transformations that happen in families and the insecurities members of that family can feel, toward those changes, is a relatable theme that has always been present in my work and continues to heavily influence this project. My personal insecurities with my grandmother's memory loss and eventual death are motivating factors in my art making. Evolving from previous projects dealing with grief, after the loss of my father, it is only natural to now deal with a subject that questions the paradigms within families and illuminates the fact that there is no perfection to being a family member. However while dealing with these topics I have really unearthed the true reality of becoming a family member.

The significance of my project not only lies in the questions I am asking myself and in turn asking my audience to ask themselves, but also in the actual human interaction that is taking place in the creation of this work of art. The art is not just the finished project to be presented in the Atrium Gallery but this work of art is apparent in the connections built, stories told, and love and respect that has grown in my relationship to my grandmother. I hope to walk away from this piece not only feeling that I have completed a work of art but that I have also become a more significant part of my grandmothers life.

Artwork about human connection has grown in importance as the technology of our time has grown in accessibility, we are now able to connect with many more people than before and artists are taking full advantage of this advancement. Artists such as Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher in the *Learning to Love You More Project* have been able to connect people in the most seemingly innocuous way, an anonymous website that presents followers with daily tasks, this website created a sounding board for the most creative displays of human interaction with tasks such as "Assignment 20: take a family portrait of two families, Assignment 31: Spend time with a dying person, or Assignment 4: start a lecture series." Miranda July consistently creates work about human interaction through her film, *You, Me, and Everyone we Know*; and her publication *It chooses You*,

she creates work about people that could not seem further apart being brought together in the most mundane yet extraordinary of ways. Similarly artists such as Elisabeth Subrin, Erik Kessels and Joachim Schmid approach human connectivity in very different ways. Subrin tells the story of a person after they have passed away in her video *The Fancy*, discussing the brief but astonishing life of Francesca Woodman. Erik Kessels and Joachim Schmid both create work about strangers using found or purchased photographs depicting that persons life, thus creating connections that may not have existed before but now through their work forms new relationships.

*Passing On: an act of love in five parts*, is not a piece about human connectivity, it is a piece of human connectivity and using the influence of these artists who have so successfully created work about and of human relationships, I hope to create a meaningful and significant piece of artwork for me as well as the art community as a whole.

## Influences

While working on *Passing On: An Act of Love in Five Parts*, I have taken Influence from many different artists and films. Artists such as Elisabeth Subrin, Jim Dine, and Miranda July are just a few that have inspired my work with people as well as objects related to those people.

Elisabeth Subrin is a video artist currently working in New York; her work *The Fancy*, has been my largest influence in my want to create a work that not only tells a story but also simultaneously questions that story. *The Fancy* is a video piece that explores the life of artist Francesca Woodman. The video uses catalogues of information on Woodman, and through re-evaluation and Subrin's art making she is able to bring to light questions about Woodman's life and her role in the art world. I believe that this outside evaluation of a person's work is in a similar vein to my evaluation of my grandmother's life and the relationship I have to her.



"Classroom" still from *The Fancy*, Elisabeth Subrin 2000, video 36:00

Mike Mills' film *Beginners*, is also a large influence to my story telling, thematic choices, and aesthetic presentation. *Beginners* is a story of a son coping with the death of his father, and working to develop a relationship through memories, while also falling in love with a woman who will never know him before his grief. The cinematography of this film is beautiful, but the creative use of objects and photographs that are edited into the film, help me to look at creative solutions to the objects I am working with. This

movie skillfully combines the use of objects to enhance narrative while also dealing with themes of coping; very closely mimicking themes I personally deal with in my work.

Film Stills from *Beginners*, Mike Mills 2010, taken by author

Sculptor, photographer, performance artist, and poet Jim Dine also creates work that inspires me to reconsider the use and conversation that can happen through inanimate objects. Jim Dine has worked for the last decade on the form and story of Pinocchio, the boy-puppet. Dine is an artist that I find myself turning to when I have a question about how to treat a singular object in multiple ways. Dine has successfully used the form of Pinocchio in wood sculpture, bronze statues and even printmaking. It has almost become a talisman for Dine that I find myself closely relating to the objects from my grandmother. Like Dine I also use my objects, as he uses Pinocchio, to symbolize a larger story that expands beyond the singular object.

Left: Pinocchio, Jim Dine and Carlo Collodi, 2006 Color lithograph, hand colored with watercolor, pastel, and acrylic.  
Right: Jim Dine *The Crying Sand*, 2006 Enamel on wood

In a more minute way artists such as Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher have inspired me through the *Learning to Love You More Project*, an artwork that was able to



connect people in the most seemingly innocuous way, an anonymous website that presents followers with daily tasks, this website created a sounding board for the most creative displays of human interaction with tasks such as “Assignment 20: take a family portrait of two families, Assignment 31: Spend time with a dying person, or Assignment 4: start a lecture series.” Miranda July also creates work about human interaction through her film, *You, Me, and Everyone we Know*; and her publication *It chooses You*, she creates work about people that could not seem further apart being brought together in the most mundane yet extraordinary of ways. Similarly artists such as Erik Kessels and Joachim Schmid approach human connectivity in very different ways. Erik Kessels and Joachim Schmid both create work about strangers using found or purchased photographs depicting that persons life, thus creating connections that may not have existed before but now through their work forms new relationships. All of these artists have helped me to form the most important and significant aspect of my thesis, the physical relationship I am creating with my grandmother. These artist have truly not only inspired my work but also my ability to create deep and meaningful relationships in my life, that directly correlates to the art I make and will continue to make.



Still image from “You , Me and everyone we know” Miranda July, 2005 ,taken by author

## Artistic Process and Technique

Working from a theme I have been focusing on for the past year, of grief and personal insecurities within family and relationships to family members who are at the end of their lives was the most natural starting point for my thesis. Tailoring my senior thesis to a goal I have had since the summer of 2012 made perfect sense: to create a relationship with my grandmother. I had progressed through many projects dealing with her as well as collaborating with her, and none of the projects seemed to create closure to the unique situation we found ourselves in. In conceptualizing this project I felt the project would be most affecting if it were to actually prove to bond us together. My inclination to self-portraiture was the direction I had planned to head; I chose to create a performance about my relationship to my grandmother. I found myself questioning things such as, what kind of performance? Is it necessary to simplify? Do I make a documentary about her? Do I show her? I outstandingly found myself realizing that the answer to many of my questions, was answered by my grandmother on our first meeting for the project... “I don’t want to be video taped!”... “I like my voice!”... and “Are you taking care of my rug, you know you need to vacuum it.” So I decided to be the singular performer, use the rug as the stage of my performance, as well as only use her voice. The piece turned into a five act “play” very unexpectedly but once I started separating it I felt it added clarity to the concept while also aiding the audience by allowing for contextual information from titles.

When starting to actualize my concept I found myself in a very interesting place, combining performance, video, sculpture, and photography. I decided that performing all of this on a rug would only work if I was planning to record an areal view, so I began by creating a customary mount to attach my camera to the ceiling of my set, so I could have a perfect 90-degree shot at the floor. I positioned the rug I used as my stage underneath the camera, using a live capture program, tethering the camera to my computer, to align the framing of the video with the parameter of the rug. I then shoot my footage; my basic footage is all reactionary gestures to audio I captured of my grandmother responding to specific questions I asked her on our many meetings during the production of this project. I also recorded some of the most poignant footage using the object of the handkerchief as

a symbol for death and burial, I choose to use this object directly during shooting because it is an easily recognizable object. Other objects were added later in post-production editing because of the necessity to distort the objects to make them more recognizable to the viewer. While shooting the footage over a series of weeks, I also simultaneously visited my grandmother to record audio. The audio is of my grandmother's voice is broken into four acts; my voice closes the piece as the fifth act. The first act's audio is my grandmother telling anecdotes from her memoirs; the second act's audio is my grandmother talking about her expectations and perceptions of me. Act three's audio is my grandmother discussing what she does everyday in the assisted living community she now lives in, act four's audio is my grandmother reciting her favorite story, and act five is a personal anecdote of my reaction to being my grandmother's granddaughter.

Once all of my footage and audio was captured, I could begin post-production editing, this is the most complicated and tedious step in creating the piece. Using the video editing software, Adobe After Effects I was able to create my video work as if creating a painting. I used the program to create second by second stop motion parts of my video as well as combining the recorded video with the photographs. I am also using After Effects for its superior masking abilities; masking is a term used in video editing when one picture or video is seamlessly inserted into the other. Using masking I was able to insert images of my grandmother's Hummels, sword toothpicks, and characters from old photographs, such as my grandmother's poodle George, wearing sunglasses, and Donald Duck. I also use effects and features in the program to insert the text that begins each act.

I believe that through each part of this process, from conception to post-production my relationship with my grandmother changed considerably, I may not have reached the closure I was hoping for, but a growth in the current relationship is a true success to me, and I hope this relationship is visible to my viewer through the work, on any level they may perceive it.



## Description of Work

In creating *Passing On* I analyzed the very specific steps we as people go through in creating relationships, I broke this relationship building experience into five distinct parts. The first part or act, entitled, *Remembering Memories Already Forgotten*, represents the time and steadfastness that goes into knowing someone. Truly understanding someone comes from accepting where they have come from, and knowing the stories of what they believe to be the most significant times in their lives. This step is essential in the creation of empathy. The video then transitions into the second act, *Perceptions of Self, Expectations of Others*, what I believe to be the second phase of creating a relationship; the internal decisions that we make in order to maintain a relationship. In the birth of closeness the two people involved must understand the expectations of their relationship. The third act works as an extension of the second act, titled, *Do as I Say Not as I Do*. This act analyzes the choice of emulating the actions and mentalities of each person in the relationship. Act four, titled, *Teach Me How To Love You*, is the last step to truly create empathy in the relationship; it is the sharing of time, life experiences, and truly understanding the sadness of the other person, the creation of sympathy. The piece finally ends with the fifth act, entitled, *Memories To Be Forgotten, Things To Be Thrown Away*; this act represents the ultimate decision made about the relationship. Choosing either to continue fostering the relationship, hoping it may grow into something beautiful and profound; or allowing the relationship to fall by the way side and slowly burn out.

While I formatted my acts to represent universal stepping-stones to building relationships, *Passing On* is specifically about the relationship I have tried and failed to create with my grandmother. In the attempt at a relationship the two acts that best correlate are Act 1 and Act 5, in the first act the viewer is asked to listen to my grandmother, questioning: “what do you want me to talk about?” opening the piece with this question allows the viewer to already question the relationship that the speaker (my grandmother) has to the projection (myself). Her asking me why I would want to talk to her, questioning my interest in her life, is a cue, that the relationship between my grandmother and myself is not on the most personal “grandmother-granddaughter” level.

She then begins to tell the most significant stories from her life that she can remember; the disconnected nature of the way she speaks as well as the absurdity of the stories themselves creates a very purposeful contrast with the projected video. The video depicts me rolling onto the rug; handkerchiefs once owned by my grandmother cover my body until I become the silhouette of a body in fetal position, hidden from view under white cloth. These handkerchiefs not only represent a group of the objects given to me by my grandmother but also represent the sheet that covers the body of a corpse. This white sheet works as a barrier, seen as a sign of respect for the dead but also a protection to witnesses of the body and a blockade, as if the white sheet will allow those present to un-see death. This direct symbol of dying correlates with the age that is apparent in my grandmother's voice, allowing the viewer to once again question the relationship I have with my grandmother. As she discusses her many interesting life stories, pictures from her life appear on top of my body. I become a canvas for her story telling, but as the viewer watches the images appear and disappear as she talks; they will soon see that every picture appearing on top of my body contains a body of water. This water represents the sacrament of baptism, this cleanse of my personal animosity, begins this new "clean slate" relationship that I have attempted to create with my grandmother. This symbolism is also representational of the holy water used in the sacrament of last rites, a blessing given to people close to the end of their lives. As act one ends, I roll out of the numerous handkerchiefs covering my body, showing an overcoming of the grief and awareness that the handkerchiefs represents.

It is not until act five that the handkerchiefs appear again, in the final passing away of the relationship, and the objects that make that relationship physical. Act five becomes the antithesis of act one, at this point, as act five opens the audio shifts, and the viewer begins to hear my voice. My voice becomes a responding tone to the previous conversation my grandmother has been having, I begin my audio as if in a confessional, telling the viewer that my last confession was five years ago and also telling my viewer that these are things I would never confess to "you." I then continue to recite the act of contrition, a prayer that is commonly used in the sacrament of confession. The act continues with my voice reciting what I consider to be a list of "my sins" as I simultaneously lay all of our quasi owned objects on the rug. These "sins" are a list of

fears, worries, and wants that through the piece I admit to being more willing to disclose to strangers, than being able to make a clean breast to my grandmother. It is at this point in my confession that the objects begin to be covered with the same handkerchiefs that had previously covered my body. This represents the abandoning of my endeavor to create a true relationship with my grandmother. My titling this act as *Memories To Be Forgotten, Things To Be Thrown Away* is a direct forsaking of the empathy and sympathy necessary to create a meaningful relationship with her. Act five ends through my awareness that in order to do penance for my “sins” I must truly care for my grandmother, I then conclude that I may never ever be able to do my penance, it is at this point that the objects that have been covered just as my body was covered, disappear, and unlike my body they do not overcome the sheet that has been imposed on top of them.

This total rejection of our dually owned objects, a physical reminder of our bond, having disappeared shows my true ambivalence toward creating a relationship. This piece becomes truly about not just the relationship I tried to create but about the self-awareness that as a young adult I have grown into, now realizing I do not have an obligation to create the perfect paradigmatic relationship I have always believed I should have. But just by allowing myself to embrace the only relationship we have had, to just continue to be the granddaughter I have been all along and not an idealistic perfected version of myself, I may be able to create a truly empathetic and sympathetic relationship with my grandmother.

Passing On: an Act of Love in Five  
Parts; 25:37 minutes



tell me your life story, tell me  
what you do, tell me who you are,  
tell me who I am... Please.

In July of 2012 my family forcibly  
moved my Grandmother from her  
long-term home in Mayfield, Kentucky: a  
home she had lived in for close to 50 years;  
into an assisted living community, closer to  
family that could take care of her. This  
move resulted in my grandmother  
having to make decisions about what  
objects, of the immense amount of things  
she had collected and kept in her home,  
to now move with her to a, maybe, 700  
square foot apartment. It was her decisions in  
the summer of 2012 that truly began the  
relationship I now have with my grandmother.

The first 20 years of my life I had always  
been around my grandmother but never in a  
typical grandmother-granddaughter way.  
our interactions were always very much the  
opposite of that paradigm, I always felt  
more mature than her, while I was aware  
that she seemed to possess a free spirit that  
as a child I thought I should have. The  
tables of child and adult were continuously  
turned in our situation.





Because of this role reversal, I felt a distance toward her and truly only connected myself to her through our apparent resemblance we had to one another. But it was in this particular summer that my grandmother passed along a small portion of her collection to me. It was at this exchange that I saw the possibility of changing my relationship with my grandmother, using these physical objects as a connection and a way to overcome my ambivalence to our relationship.

While she thought she was giving me 7 boxes of "stuff" what she was really giving me was a piece of her life, and not the piece I was already a part of. This piece was from a time before me, it predated me by almost 50 years, a time I had rarely heard of. It became my sole job as her grand daughter, as well as an artist, to better understand her and all of these things she had so "purposefully" given me. As I started investigating I realized that what I thought was now mine, was really the both of ours. It was as though we were dual owners of these objects, both caring for them in different ways. I immediately became uncomfortable, seeing myself as an interloper in her memories.



my realization and discomfort  
forced me to undertake a  
complete change in my  
relationship to my grandmother.  
I had to actually have  
one. This is my attempt..

A. Corinne TeHeave  
2013

## Exhibition List

Passing On: An Act of Love in Five Parts, HD Video, Projection, Platform 4"x3.11'x6.9'

A Voice of Reason, Mono Audio, Speaker, 5"x6"x5.3'

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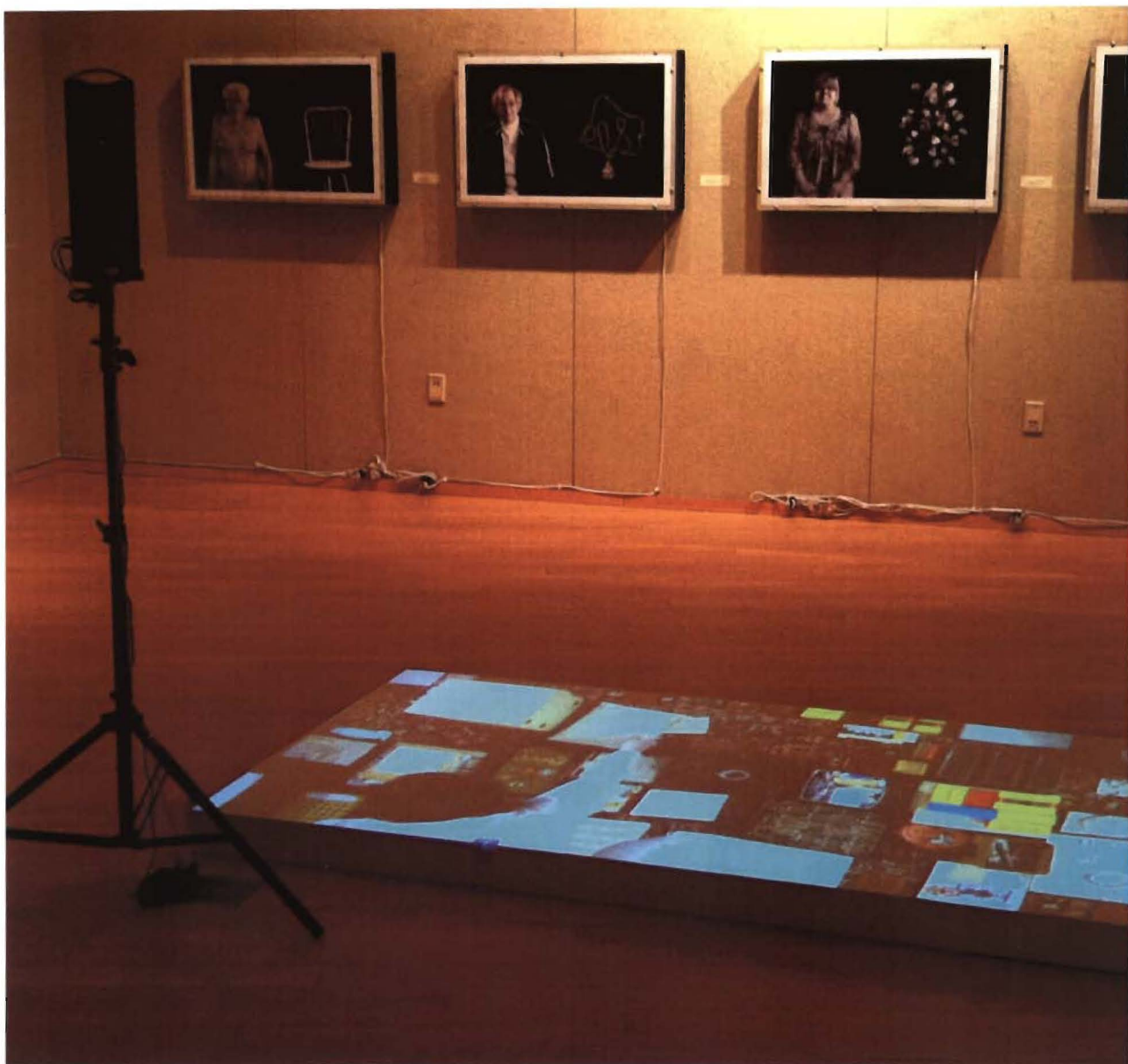
Pinocchio, Jim Dine and Carlo Collodi, 2006 Color lithograph, hand colored with watercolor, pastel, and acrylic. Source. Web. 13 Mar. 2013.  
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Exhibition Images



Installation view, *Passing On: An Act of Love in Five Parts*, Atrium Gallery, Ball State University, Muncie, IN, April 7-13<sup>th</sup> 2013.



Installation view, *Passing On: An Act of Love in Five Parts*, Atrium Gallery, Ball State University, Muncie, IN, April 7-13<sup>th</sup> 2013.



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